

"Speaking With The Spirit"
Acts 2:1-11

May 24, 2015

The Day of Pentecost

Isn't it amazing how differently we feel about our ability to perform a task, depending upon the situation and how we feel about the task? For example, there are some days when a man will say the weather outside is just too bad to be out mowing the lawn in. However, put a golf club or fishing pole in his hand, and suddenly he thinks the weather is just fine to be out in. Kids are good at this, too. You go to wake your young child up on a cold winter morning and he says, "It's too early. I just can't get up." However, as he lays there and bemoans the fact that he can't get up, the radio comes on and says that school is canceled for the day because of the great amount of snow that has fallen. He hears that and suddenly he leaps out of bed, starts getting dressed, and yells to his brother, "Let's go play in the snow!!!"

Funny, isn't it? If you enjoy a task or feel good about your ability to do it, you think you can do it no matter what. Conversely, if you don't enjoy a task or feel shaky about your ability to do it, you think you can't do it no matter what, even if the situations are the same.

We tend to do the same in our spiritual life. The first key thing in our spiritual lives is faith. When the jailer at Philippi asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved, they replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) When it comes to that, we think, "No problem. I can do that." In some churches, faith is emphasized as something that can be acquired through an intellectual process --a thorough study of the Scriptures, memorization, and recitation of the same. If you are smart enough or study hard enough, you can learn "faith." Sometimes, people perceive our confirmation program as giving that impression. Confirmands may feel proud when they have "passed" confirmation.

Other churches emphasize faith as something that can be attained through an act of the will. If you try hard enough or want it badly enough, then you can have faith. So, people are urged to

"make a decision for Christ", "invite Jesus into your heart", and so on. People seem to exude pride when they have made that decision and count that day as they day the "got saved".

The second key thing in our spiritual life is speaking that faith to others. Jesus has called us to be His witnesses. But, when it comes to this, we think, "No way. I can't do that." We may say that it is because we feel that we don't know the Bible well enough to speak to others about Christ. We may say that it is because we are just too shy and not good enough at speaking to others about our faith. And, even if we can talk about our faith, we're not sure anyone will even understand or believe it. The new generation seems to speak an entirely different language. We think that witnessing to Christ is best left to the more talented Christians and the clergy.

Funny, isn't it? When it is one necessary part of our Christian life - faith in Christ - which seems very personal and non-threatening to us, we feel very confident that we can do it ourselves and take pride in thinking we are doing it. Yet, when it is another necessary part of our Christian life - witnessing about Christ - which seems to be a little more public and threatening to us, we feel very incapable of doing it and make all sorts of excuses as to why we can't do it.

What's the answer here about these two things? Can we or can't we and which one? The fact of the matter is that we can do neither of these things - come to faith or speak the faith - on our own. We are all spiritually incapable of doing *anything* in our relationship with God. It is not because we are not smart enough learn it, not serious enough to make a decision about it, or not talented enough to speak it. It is because you are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1). This means that, on your own, you are can neither accept nor even understand the things of God. (1 Cor. 2:14) But it's not just that you are neutral. The Bible says that you, on your own, are hostile to the will of God. You do not submit to the law of God, nor can you. (Rom. 8:7) It doesn't matter how smart you are, how decisive you are, or how glib you are. You simply cannot do it. As Luther put it in his Small Catechism, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him."

The apostles are good examples of this. They *thought* they could have faith in Christ on their own. Jesus told them that he would be arrested, beaten, and crucified. In their foolish pride, they made great promises that they would follow Christ, even if it meant they would have to die with him. Yet, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the garden, their "faith" crumbled and they all fled. They remained in hiding throughout the crucifixion and even on Easter evening. So much for self-generated faith.

Not one of these brave disciples spoke up for Jesus. The strong one named Peter even denied knowing Jesus, not once, but three times. On the day of Pentecost, they were faced with a huge challenge. They were a small group in a city full of unbelievers, gathered for the Jewish festival of Pentecost. They were from different countries and different cultures. Surely, speaking the Good News of salvation and hope in Jesus Christ would be an impossible task if left up to them.

But Jesus did not leave it up to them. During the last week of His life on earth, Jesus had promised to send a Counselor, a Comforter, who would testify to them about Him and would help them remember and believe everything He had told them. Before He ascended, in telling them that they would be witnesses to Him throughout the world, He said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them with the sound of a violent wind and the appearance of tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit accomplished two miracles on that day. By filling them, faith was restored to these frightened and doubting disciples. And, they were given the ability to speak this faith. As the text says, they "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Not only that, but the audience of people from different languages and cultures throughout the world were able to understand. They exclaimed, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Peter, the coward and denier, stood up and spoke boldly and fearlessly of His faith in Christ. This Spirit-filled and Spirit-inspired message was effective. Later on

in the chapter, it says "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

These were the same men who totally misunderstood Jesus' message and ran away when the going got tough. These were the same men who denied Jesus' and refused to confess Him before men during His trial and death. They did not get smarter in Scripture or more skilled in witnessing by their own efforts. The one and only difference here was the addition of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

We look wistfully at that story and wish the same could be true for us today as 21st century Christians here in isolated Montana. The Good News is that it *is* the same. We don't have to depend on ourselves or a third string Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who filled those apostles on Pentecost Day is the Holy Spirit who fills you and me.

You are here today and have faith that receives the forgiveness of sins by Jesus' death on the cross and the assurance of everlasting life by Jesus' resurrection, not because you are smarter than anyone else or because you made some sort of decision to do so, but because the Holy Spirit has filled you and given you that faith. The Scripture says, "no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3) He was poured out upon you in your baptism as Peter himself promised in his Pentecost sermon where he said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." He developed that faith, planted in baptism, as you heard the Word of God. As we confess in Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, "the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the one true faith."

And, as far as speaking that truth to the world, you don't have to worry about your own inabilities or leave it up to the "professionals" in the church to do it for you. The Holy Spirit who has filled you and give you faith will also empower you to speak that faith. He calls every Christian to give witness to Jesus Christ and their faith in him, but in different ways and in different situations.

He calls some to speak that witness from a pulpit. He calls others to speak that witness in a classroom as a teacher. He calls others to speak that witness in schools, in business establishments, in diners, and in wheat fields. Wherever you go, He goes with you. You don't have to search for opportunities to witness or create them yourself. He provides the opportunities by leading you to encounter people who need the Gospel and by leading those people to encounter you. You don't have to be afraid or nervous. The Holy Spirit will take away your fear and doubt as He did for Peter that day. And, you don't have to "know it all", memorize a speech to give, or prepare answers to every question that a non-Christian might have. Jesus told His disciples not to worry about what to say by promising, "the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." (Luke 12:12) And, best of all, you don't have to convince anyone to believe your testimony or convert them to faith in Christ. The Spirit who has called *you* by the Gospel will be the one and only person to call other non-believers by the Gospel. That burden and responsibility is off your shoulders.

The color for the Day of Pentecost is red, the color of fire. It not only reminds us of the story of Pentecost and the tongues of fire by which the Holy Spirit showed itself, but also the power of the Holy Spirit when He comes to an individual. Unlike a raging fire which destroys and causes death, the power of the Holy Spirit "rages" to create faith and gives life through the Gospel, "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16) May that power which has brought forth faith in your lives also empower you to speak of that faith to others as you speak, not by your own power or strength, but as you "speak with the Spirit" and with the power He brings here in church and wherever you go. Amen.